

## RELIGION AND CHIEFTAINCY: THE CASE OF AKAN CHIEFTAINCY

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The same parental presupposition of chieftaincy rule provides us with both the perspectives and values that regulate the political roles and functions of the chief as the political head and chief executive of the nation. The management aspect of the political role of the chief as the chief executive of the nation includes the maintenance of law and order, environmental protection and development understood in the wider sense of moral, spiritual, cultural and conditions for growth of the people which reflects the goodwill of the ancestors towards the people. In this sense, the rituals that ensure the moral, social and environmental integrity of the nation are proper duties and obligations of the chief as the father of the nation and priest that mediate between the people and ancestors.

Finally, the military roles and functions of the chief as the leader of his people imply the parental responsibility to provide protection and security as enshrined in the social contract between the chief and the people in the oath he swears to them. This protective function of the chief is consistent with the oath which chiefs swear to their people to serve, defend and protect the people at all times. The protective function of the chief is usually expressed in appellations and honorific titles of the chief that shows his power and might.

#### The chief as moral Icon

The taboos that regulate the conduct of the chief highlight the status of the chief as the link between the living and departed ancestors and therefore a “de jure” ancestor, who must exhibit the moral qualities of the ancestors. The chief as representative of the ancestors therefore must exhibit in his life the moral values that bind the society together with the ancestors and give it identity. The chief in his capacity as the living representative of the ancestors must jealously guard the moral values that regulate the life of the society with appropriate punishments and sanctions that will enforce the moral law and deter law-breakers. Therefore, anytime the chief who is expected to be the custodian of the moral values and ideals of the society breaks the moral law and undermines the values of the society, “he ipso” facto abdicates his role as a representative of the ancestors and therefore cannot legally and morally continue to be a chief. This is the more reason why some of the most serious offences that bring about destoolment are those that have to do with the behavior and conduct of chiefs. Conversely, the taboos that regulate the social and moral life of the chief are meant to protect him from defiling his office through immoral behaviors. (Akron 1991:176). This is the reason why the chief is expected to exhibit the noble qualities of the ancestors. The chief must be gentle, kind, hospitable, generous, caring and well behaved, to reflect the character and the qualities that qualify one to become an ancestor in the Akan society. (Akron 1991: 175)

#### The Chief as Priest

The priestly functions and roles of the chief are based on the status of the chief as the link between the living and the departed ancestors. The logic is that since the chief is related by blood to the departed chiefs who have now become ancestors, the filial bond between him and ancestors confers on him the legitimacy that gives him the rights to petition the ancestors directly and solicit their blessings. The blood relationship between the chiefs and the ancestors also makes him eligible to represent the people before the ancestors. The priestly function of the chief is based on filial bond and direct blood relationship with the ancestors. The regular Adaye and Odwira celebrations by the chief are the formal worship occasions, when the chiefs renew their ties with the ancestors.

**Compiled by: Kofi Dapaah Okae Gyening**

***REFERENCES***

***Chieftaincy, Traditional leadership and development in Africa. IAS, Legon, 2003.***

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